

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 182

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AEMBASSY CAIRO 1126

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 6670

EXDIS

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: UR, US XF

SUBJECT: THE SOVIETS, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

REF: MOSCOW 6585

1. SUMMARY. SINCE THE BREAKDOWN OF THE SECRETARY'S LAST SHUTTLE, MOSCOW'S ROUND OF MIDDLE EAST CONSULTATIONS HAS FOCUSED ON SECURING AN ACTIVE SOVIET ROLE IN THE NEXT CYCLE OF ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. IN TALKS WITH ARAB PRINCIPALS THE SOVIETS HAVE MOUNTED A STRONG CAMPAING TO OBTAIN UNITED ARAB SUPPORT FOR MOVING FUTURE NEGOTIATINS TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THROUGH A SERIES OF OVERTURES TO ISRAEL AND A DEMONSTRATION OF FLEXIBILITY ON THE MODALITIES OF GENEVA, THEY HAVE TRIED TO ENHANCE THE USSR'S CREDIBILITY WITH TEL AVIV AS
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AN IMPORTANT MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATING PARTNER AND TO REMOVE OR

MINIMIZE OBSTACLES STANDING IN THE WAY OF RECONSTITUTING THE MEPC FORUM. THE RESULTS OF THESE SOVIET INITIATIVES ARE AS YET FAR FROM CLEAR. HOWEVER, MOSCOW HAS CLEARLY GAINED SOME MEASURE OF SUCCESS BY OBTAINING EXPLICIT EGYPTIAN AND PALESTINIAN ENDORSEMENT FOR THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. AS A RESULT WE BELIEVE THE SOVIETS THINK THAT THEY HAVE STRENGTHENED THEIR HAND VIS-A-VIS THE U.S. AND THAT CHANCES FOR ACHIEVING AN ACTIVE MIDDLE EAST ROLE DURING THE NEXT CYCLE OF NEGOTIATIONS HAVE IMPROVED. HOWEVER, MOSCOW CLEARLY REMAINS UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE ATTITUDE OF THE U.S., WHICH THE SOVIETS VIEW AS CRITICAL. AS GROMYKO PREPARES FOR HIS MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY, THEREFORE, WE BELIEVE THAT FOREMOST AMONG HIS CONCERNS WILL BE WHETHER THE U.S. HAS DECIDED TO INCLUDE THE USSR ACTIVELY IN THE NEXT MIDDLE EAST ROUND, OR WHETHER WASHINGTON HAS CONCLUDED THAT DENIAL OF A SOVIET ROLE AS A PERMANENT MIDDLE EAST POWER IS TO BE THE BASIS OF FUTURE U.S. APPROACHES TO SETTLING THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE THE SUSPENSION OF THE SECRETARY'S ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN SHUTTLE, MOSCOW HAS MOUNTED A MAJOR DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE ON THE MIDDLE EAST. THIS ACTIVITY HAS INCLUDED WIDE-RANGING CONTACTS WITH ALL THE MAJOR PARTIES TO THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT, INCLUDING ISRAEL, AS WELL AS TALKS WITH SEVERAL SECONDARY STATES (E.G., IRAQ AND, CURRENTLY, LIBYA AND TUNISIA). THROUGHOUT THESE CONSULTATIONS THE MAIN SOVIET OBJECTIVE HAS APPARENTLY BEEN TO ESTABLISH A SECURE ROLE FOR THE USSR IN FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE MIDDLE EAST. SOVIET TALKS WITH ARAB REPRESENTATIVES HAVE THUS DOGGEDLY PURSUED ARAB COMMITMENTS TO EMPLOY THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AS THE VENUE FOR FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS TOWARD A ME SETTLEMENT AND HAVE SOUGHT TO END ARAB--PARTICULARLY EGYPTIAN--RELIANCE ON THE U.S. AS THE EXCLUSIVE ARAB-ISRAELI GO-BETWEEN.

3. THE RESULTS OF THIS SOVIET EFFORT REMAIN FAR FROM CLEAR TO US BECAUSE SO MUCH DEPENDS ON THE RESPONSE OF THE ME PARTIES THEMSELVES. HOWEVER, FROM THE SOVIETS' VANTAGE POINT, MOSCOW'S INITIATIVE AT LEAST OVERTLY HAS ACHIEVED A SIGNIFICANT MEASURE OF SUCCESS. PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT, EGYPT, DURING FAHMY'S VISIT TO MOSCOW, PUBLICLY ACCEPTED THE GENEVA FORUM AS THE VENUE FOR FURTHER MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS AND IMPLICITLY ABANDONED RELIANCE ON THE U.S.'S STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH. AFTER MONTHS OF FUTLE ENDEAVOR TO OBTAIN EGYPT'S ACCEPTANCE OF THIS FORMULA, MOSCOW

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CERTAINLY TAKES THIS AS A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT. EQUALLY IMPORTANT AND PROBABLY AS DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE WAS PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE BY ARAFAT AND COMPANY IN THE PLO-SOVIET COMMUNIQUE OF MAY 5 OF PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE MEPC, WHICH FOLLOWED ON A SYRIAN ENDORSEMENT OF GENEVA SIMILAR TO THAT GIVEN BY THE EGYPTIANS. ARMED WITH AT LEAST A SEMBLANCE OF ARAB UNITY ON THIS ISSUE, THE SOVIETS PROBABLY REGARD THEIR POSITION AS THE STRONGEST SINCE THE OCTOBER WAR IN DEALING WITH THE U.S. OVER THE

MODALITIES FOR FURTHER STEPS TOWARD A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT.

4. WHILE THE SOVIETS WERE CAREFULLY GATHERING ARAB SUPPORT FOR GENEVA, MOSCOW HAS ALSO SOUGHT TO REMOVE OR MINIMIZE OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE MEPC BY THE PARTIES, PARTICULARLY ISRAEL AND THE U.S. AS PROSPECTS FOR GENEVA IMPROVED AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE SECRETARY'S LAST SHUTTLE, MOSCOW CONSCIOUSLY AND VISIBLY STEPPED UP CONTACTS WITH ISRAEL, MOST NOTABLY THROUGH THE MISSION OF THE SOVIET EMISSARIES TO TEL AVIV IN APRIL. AT THE SAME TIME THE SOVIETS BALANCED THEIR CONTINUED ASSURANCES OF SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL'S ADVERSARIES WITH UNUSUALLY EXPLICIT AND FORTHRIGHT ASSURANCES THAT THE USSR REMAINS COMMITTED TO SUPPORT FOR A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT BASED ON ISRAEL'S 1967 FRONTIERS. TO THESE ASSURANCES WERE ADDED AN OFFER OF INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEES FOR ISRAEL'S SECURITY WITH SOVIET PARTICIPATION, PROVIDING AN ACCEPTABLE MIDDLE EAST POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IS ACHIEVED. WHILE NOT NEW, THESE STATEMENTS--PARTICULARLY IN GROMYKO'S SPEECH FOR SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM APRIL 23--WERE EXCEPTIONALLY EXPLICIT AND UNUSUAL, GIVEN NORMAL SOVIET RETICENCE ABOUT REFERENCES TO ISRAEL'S FRONTIERS AND SECURITY DURING VISITS BY ARAB DELEGATIONS.

5. ALL THESE STEPS APPEAR CALCULATED TO BRING THE ISRAELIS TO A MORE BALANCED VIEW ABOUT MOSCOW'S POTENTIAL IMPORTANCE TO TEL AVIV AS A FORCE FOR STABILITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. WITH GENEVA IN THE CARDS, IT PROBABLY ALSO SEEMED ADVISABLE FOR MOSCOW TO PUT ITSELF IN A BETTER POSITION TO DEAL WITH TEL AVIV. SIMILARLY, SOVIET REVIVAL OF THE ISRAEL OPTION WOULD NOT BE LOST ON THE EGYPTIANS AND OTHER ARABS WHO HAVE SOUGHT TO PROFIT FROM MOSCOW'S WEAK DIPLOMATIC POSITION.

6. THE SOVIETS ALSO MADE EFFORTS--PRESUMABLY WITH A VIEW TO INCREASING U.S. AND ISRAELI INCENTIVE TO ACCEPT THE GENEVA

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CONFERENCE--TO DEFUSE, OR AT LEAST TO LEAVE OPEN, ISSUES INVOLVING THE MEPC ITSELF WHICH STAND OUT AS MAJOR OBSTACLES TO RECONVENING THE GENEVA FORUM. THUS, ALTHOUGH MOSCOW ENDORSED PLO PARTICIPATION IN THE MEPC, IT CAREFULLY AVOIDED A FIXED POSITION ON THE TIMING OF THE PLO'S ATTENDANCE AT THE CONFERENCE. MOSCOW ALSO REPLACED ITS EARLIER INSISTENCE ON THE IMMEDIATE RESUMPTION OF THE CONFERENCE WITH A NEW EMPHASIS ON THE NEED TO PREPARE CAREFULLY FOR THE MEETING, MAINTAINING THAT THESE ARE NOT INCOMPATIBLE OBJECTIVES. MOREOVER, THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT CLOSED THE DOOR FULLY ON A FURTHER DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT; IN EFFECT THEY HAVE TREATED THE MEPC, NOT AS AN ALTERNATIVE INCOMPATIBLE WITH PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL, BUT AS A FORUM UNDER WHOSE AUSPICES ANY FUTURE PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL MUST BE CARRIED OUT. FINALLY, THE SOVIETS, ALTHOUGH THEY MUST CERTAINLY HAVE PREFERRED SCENARIO FOR GENEVA, HAVE STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO TAKE ANY FIXED POSITIONS ABOUT THE AGENDA OR

MODALITIES FOR A RECONVENED CONFERENCE. RATHER THEY HAVE INSISTED THAT SUCH MATTERS, ALONG WITH THE QUESTION OF AN INVITATION TO THE PLO AND THE TIMEING OF THE CONFERENCE ITSELF, ARE SUBJECTS FOR CONSULTATION AMONG THE PARTIES, BUT MORE PARTICULARLY BETWEEN THE U.S. AND USSR AS CO-CHAIRMEN OF THE GENEVA FORUM.

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USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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7. AS THE ABOVE SUGGESTS, MOSCOW'S DIPLOMACY SINCE THE BREAKDOWN OF ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS HAS ASSIDUOUSLY PRUSUED THE ACCEPTANCE OF GENEVA THROUGH CAREFULLY BALANCED INCENTIVES TO EACH OF THE PARTIES AND A FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO THOSE ISSUES WHICH THREATEN TO OBSTRUCT REVIVAL OF THE MEPC. DESPITE THEIR APPARENT SUCCESSES IN ACHIEVING A DEGREE OF ARAB CONSENSUS ABOUT GENVEA, THE SOVIETS ARE CERTAINLY AWARE THAT THE OUTLOOK FOR THE CONFEEENCE DEPENDS ON THE ACTUAL REPSONSE OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFRONTATION STATES. AND AS RECENT STATEMENTS STRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF ARAB UNITY SUGGEST, THE SOVIETS ARE FULLY AWARE THAT THE COMMITMENTS TO GENEVA THEY HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE ARABS ARE FRAGILE. HAVING THUS PREPARED THE GROUND, HOWEVER, E WE BELIEVE

THAT MOSCOW NOW LOOKS UPON THE U.S.'S ATTITUDE AS CRITICAL. AS WE HAVE HEARD OFTEN FROM THE SOVIETS--MOST RECENTLY FROM SYTENKO (REFTEL)--THE SOVIETS INSIST THAT THE U.S. AND USSR AS CO-CHAIRMEN OF THE MEPC ARE IN A POSITION TO BRING THE PARTIES TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE.

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8. IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN, THEREFORE, THAT DURING GROMYKO'S MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY IN VIENNA, HE WILL HOPE TO OBTAIN A U.S. COMMITMENT TO EMPLOY THE GENEVA CONFERENCE FOR FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS AND TO COUNT THE SOVIETS IN ON THE NEXT ROUND IN THE MIDDLE EAST. IN SEEKING THIS COMMITMENT FROM THE U.S. WE SUSPECT THAT GROMYKO WILL RELY HEAVILY ON THE OSTENSIBLY FIRM ARAB CONSENSUS FOR GENEVA WHICH MOSCOW HAS PUT TOGETHER DURING ITS RECENT CONSULTATIONS. WE ASSUME THAT HE WILL CONSIDER THIS HAND STRONGER NOW THAN WAS THE CASE DURING THE SECRETARY'S LAST MEETING WHEN THE U.S. MISSION IN THE MIDDLE EAST WAS VERY MUCH ALIVE. WE THINK IT NOT UNLIKELY THAT THE SOVIETS WILL OFFER A FLEXIBLE APPROACH ON THOSE ASPECTS OF MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS WHERE THEY HAVE SO FAR CAREFULLY AVOIDED FIXED POSITIONS (E.G., PLO ATTENDANCE, TIMING, AGENDA, ETC.). AND THEY MAY ALSO BE PREPARED TO PROMISE SOVIET SUPPORT WITH SYRIA OVER RENEWING THE UNDOF MANDATE.

9. IN THEIR OWN EYES, THE SOVIETS HAVE RESISTED THE TEMPTATION TO CAPITALIZE ON THE BREAKDOWN OF U.S. SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY AND HAVE PURSUED A RESPONSIBLE AND CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH FOLLOWING THE SECRETARY'S RETURN FROM THE MIDDLE EAST. THEIR MOTIVE, OF COURSE, WAS AN INTERESTED ONE--TO GET THEMSELVES BACK INTO THE GAME THROUGH CONVENING THE MEPC AS THE NEW FOCUS OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. SINCE GENEVA IS THEIR TICKET TO THE NEGOTIATING ARENA, THEY WANT THE MEPC TO WORK, AND WE BELIEVE THEY ARE WILLING TO PAY A PRICE IN MODERATION AND FLEXIBILITY TO MAKE IT WORK. THEY HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY PATIENT ABOUT PREVIOUS USE OF ALTERNATIVES TO GENEVA. AND THEY UNDOUBTEDLY REALIZE THAT, WHILE SUCH ALTERNATIVES WERE IN PLAY, THEIR OWN EFFORTS TO GET GENEVA GOING WERE NOT VERY PERSUASIVE EITHER TO THE ARABS OR TO THE U.S. INDEED, THEIR CURRENT DIPLOMATIC ROUND HAS SHOWN THEM THAT EVEN NOW MANY PROBLEMS REGARDING THE MEPC SEEM INTRACTABLE. NEVERTHELESS, THEY BELIEVE THAT THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME TO GIVE GENEVA A CHANCE AND THAT THE U.S. IS THE KEEPER OF THE KEY TO THE CONFERENCE ROOM DOOR. THIS BEING SO, THEY ARE LIKELY TO REGARD THE U.S. ATTITUDE ON GENEVA AS A TEST OF U.S. WILLINGNESS TO CONCEDE THE SOVIET UNION A RESPONSIBLE ROLE IN MAJOR INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS. IN THIS RESPECT, THE ISSUE OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE PERHAPS ASSUMES AN IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP AS A WHOLE, EVEN BEYOND THE IMPORTANCE IT HAS FOR FUTURE COURSE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

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